



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE PROPOSES NEW RULES TO PROTECT SEA TURTLES IN VIRGINIA CHESAPEAKE BAY**

NOAA Fisheries Service has announced a proposal to require "turtle-safe" pound nets in portions of Virginia Chesapeake Bay from May 6 through July 15, a time of year when hundreds of threatened and endangered sea turtles have routinely stranded dead in the area.

A pound net fishing operation includes a "leader" that diverts swimming marine life into a "heart," which funnels the catch into a "pound." The leader consists of a series of stakes set across the current and hung with net, like a fence. The heart and pound are created by hanging a series of stakes with net to create a funnel and an enclosure that holds the catch. Sea turtles are air-breathing reptiles. They can drown or become seriously injured if entangled in or trapped against the leader.

The proposal announced today would require the use of a modified leader, designed to exclude sea turtles, in the portion of the bay where leaders are currently prohibited from May 6 through July 15 each year. The modified leader was designed and tested during experiments in 2004 and 2005 conducted by NOAA Fisheries Service and pound net fishing operations in the area.

The modified leader is similar in height to that currently in use, but mesh is hung only in the lower one-third of the submerged portion. The remainder of the leader height is hung with stiff vertical lines spaced about two feet apart. Sea turtles can pass safely through the upper two-thirds of the leader and through the stiff vertical lines.

If this proposal is approved, NOAA Fisheries Service will issue final regulations and notify the public of their effective date. Until that time, fishermen must still comply with existing regulations.

Under the Endangered Species Act, NOAA Fisheries Service is charged with conserving threatened and endangered species like these sea turtles, and can require changes in how fishing occurs to do so.

Public comments will be accepted on the proposal through May 2, 2006. A public hearing will be held in Virginia Beach, Va., from 7 to 10 p.m. on Wednesday, April 26 at the Doubletree Hotel, 1900 Pavilion Drive.

Written comments on this action or requests for copies should be sent to the Assistant Regional Administrator for Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries Service, One Blackburn

Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930. Comments and requests for supporting documents may also be faxed to 978-281-9394. For more information, contact Pat Scida at 978-281-9208 or Therese Conant at 301-713-2322.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

On the Web:

NMFS Northeast Region: [www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/index.html](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/index.html)

NOAA Fisheries Service: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov)

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